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### Conference News - October 2012



#### Board of Directors

Introducing your Moderator, Jim Crabb – Jim has served on the Board of Directors as Chair of the Finance Committee and Vice Moderator, as well as a General Synod delegate. Jim is a member of Central Congregational Church UCC in Atlanta, and has served in many capacities for that congregation, including Moderator. He currently lives in Decatur, GA with his wife of 27 years and their three sons. He is active in the Decatur Rotary Club and is a Cub Scout and former Boy Scout leader. Jim enjoys woodworking, bowl turning, canoeing, and cooking. Jim is a professional engineer registered in the states of Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida. He graduated with a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology. Jim has served as the president of PerryCrabb, a firm that specializes in health care facility design, for nearly 15 years.

Jeremy Rich, the former pastor of Bethany Congregational UCC in Thomasville, GA, has resigned from the Conference Board of Directors, on which he served as Conference Liaison to Justice and Witness Ministries. We thank Jeremy for his faithful service to the Conference as well as to the Board of Directors.

### Southeast Conference a Leader in Providing UCC History and Polity Education Across the UCC.

At the end of August, the third online UCC History and Polity Class in 2012 began with an enrollment of 24 participants. This class, which is now offered for credit at Candler School of Theology of Emory University, Columbia Theological Seminary, Eden Theological Seminary, Bangor Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Vanderbilt University Divinity School, has expanded dramatically over the last year. Developed and led by Conference Minister Tim Downs, and based on materials developed over the course of his thirteen years of teaching UCC history and polity, the class meets the requirements of most associations for "knowledge of and appreciation for UCC history and polity," for authorization for ministry in the UCC. Tim works with three teaching assistants: Laura Arnold of Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta; Leah Lyman-Waldron of Praxis UCC, Atlanta; and Cameron Barr of Plymouth UCC, Des Moines, IA. Tim says, "This class is a part of the mission of the Southeast Conference in preparing leadership for the emerging UCC. We are now able to serve not only our own leadership, but people across the UCC."

### New and Affiliating Church Updates from Across the Conference:

We are in active conversation with several congregations across the Conference about affiliating with the United Church of Christ. They are:

- o **Covenant Community Church in Center Point, AL.** Center Point is a Birmingham suburb, located east of the city. Covenant Community disaffiliated with the Metropolitan Community Church six years ago and has grown to 300 members. Led by J. R. Finney, the church has a ministry that is using technology in creative ways to extend its ministry. J.R. is seeking UCC ministerial standing.
  - o **Phoenix Christian Church, Wildersville, TN.** Wildersville is located between Memphis and Nashville, off Interstate 40. This small congregation has been supported by the leadership of Holy Trinity Community UCC, Memphis, and Holy Trinity Community UCC of Nashville. Their leadership attended the Alabama-Tennessee association meeting September 21—22.
  - o **Shrine of the Black Madonna, Atlanta.** Shrine of the Black Madonna is the offspring of its mother church, the Shrine of the Black Madonna of Detroit, which began as a UCC congregation. Its ministers hold standing in the Michigan Conference and are interested in developing relationships with the UCC here in the Atlanta area. The Shrine's pastor, Mwenda Brown, has been in conversation with Tim Downs.
  - o **United Church of Christ of Pensacola, FL.** Patrick Rogers, the pastor of this newly formed church, has joined Open Table, a Community of Faith, in Mobile, AL. He is in the process of completing the requirements for ministerial standing in the UCC, and has organized a core group of leaders. Patrick has interviewed with the Board of Directors of the Conference.
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#### **Alabama-Tennessee Association Fall Meeting: "Who Is My Neighbor?"**

On September 21 and 22, the people of the Alabama-Tennessee Association gathered for their fall meeting, hosted by our newest congregation, Safe Harbor Family United Church of Christ in Flowood, MS, outside Jackson. Over 60 people traveling from middle and eastern Tennessee and northern and central Alabama drove at least four hours, and others as long as seven, to be warmly welcomed by our hosts. We greeted old friends and welcomed the new, most notably Dr. Wendy Coleman, the newly elected pastor of First Congregational Christian UCC, Montgomery. We also welcomed a visiting congregation from Wildersville, TN: , Phoenix Christian Church, which is exploring affiliation with the United Church of Christ. The hospitality of our host church was incomparable;, the food abundant and delicious;, the worship, led by their choirs and Pastor Pam Walsh, inspiring. The theme of the meeting was "Who is My Neighbor?"and we were invited by the speakers into the world of immigration in the South. Angie Wright, pastor of Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham, and the keynoter for the meeting, called on us to be involved in the repeal of HB 56 in Alabama. She shared stories of the wrenching pain and disruptions that have scarred families torn apart by immigration legislation. She quoted a member of the Alabama legislature who said, "We want to make their lives so miserable they will just leave." The current climate in Alabama has unleashed a wave of hatred on unsuspecting people, and Angie pointed out that the church has been front and center in leading for the repeal of HB 56.

On Saturday, Bill Chandler, the Director of MIRA (Mississippi Immigration Rights Alliance), Patricia Ice, an immigration attorney in Mississippi, and Mike Knezevich, a member of Safe Harbor, presented an overview of the history of immigration in the United States, pointing out that we have throughout our history not welcomed the most recent wave of arrivals. They reported that fully 50 percent of undocumented people entered the United States legally, adding that under the Obama administration, twice as many people have been deported as under the prior Bush administration. They introduced us to "Becoming a Welcoming Congregation," a program for UCC churches that seek to extend hospitality to immigrants. Patricia Ice further recommended the excellent UCC resources at [www.ucc.org/justice/immigration](http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration). In workshops and discussions, we were equipped with the information to educate our congregations and build relationships with our new immigrant neighbors.

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#### **New Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference Holds First Meeting, September 14-15**

The newly elected Board of Directors of the Conference held its first meeting on September 14-15 in Atlanta. We welcomed our new members: Lillian Hallstrand and Lawrence Clark of Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville; Jeremy Gordon of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN; Desiree Pedesleaux, First Congregational UCC, Atlanta; and Jon Ritt of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta. Moderator Jim Crabb led the proceedings. The major agenda items were to begin organizing the Search Committee for a conference minister, organize the advisory committees and task forces for this coming program year, receive staff reports, and

prepare for the transitions in our programs and conference life with the departure of Kathy Clark and the retirement of Tim Downs in June 2013. Present with us at the meeting from the Office of General Ministries of the UCC was Susan Towner-Larson, who will serve as the national liaison for the search process for a new conference minister.

The Search Committee was elected and will be chaired by Jennifer Austin, the administrator of Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville, and vice-moderator of the Conference. Other members of the committee include; Rodney Franklin, First Congregational Christian UCC, Birmingham; John Gill, Church of the Savior, UCC, Knoxville; Lyle Weible, Pleasant Hill (TN) Community UCC; Marvin Morgan, First Congregational UCC, Atlanta; Leah Lyman-Waldron, Praxis UCC, Atlanta; and Joanne Calhoun, Circular Congregational UCC, Charleston.

We noted that the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Conference will be held at First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, on June 14-15. Planning will begin on this event, which will be an occasion for celebrating the last TAP convocation and Tim Downs' retirement. We will also be welcoming Geoffrey Black, the General Minister and President of the UCC.

In staff reports Debbie Spearman noted that she is beginning to organize the next steps of the capital campaign and is preparing for OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Sunday, October 28 , when the Board will be asked to visit churches and share information about OCWM. We are encouraged by the progress of the Capital Campaign, and the pledges that continue to come in from congregations.

Sarah Kim gave a report on the next steps of the PATHWAYS program as it expands to Iowa and other conferences in the Southern Region. We introduced our new associate Laura Arnold, who is working with Sarah.

Tim Downs spoke about the upcoming transitions for which we are preparing: his retirement, the reorganizing of the Commission on Ministry, and the organization of the office for a smooth succession. He noted that, although he appreciates the many good wishes, he will be around for the next nine months and looks forward to a vital and engaged year ahead. The organizing of the Commission on Ministry of the Conference will involve a close look at the bylaws of the Conference and each of the associations. Ginny Nixon and Susan Dunn, both Board members, will be working on the revision of bylaws at both conference and association levels.

We were introduced to Patrick Rogers, the organizing pastor for the United Church of Christ of Pensacola, FL. Patrick is a member of Open Table, A Community of Faith in Mobile, AL, and has organized a core committee. In addition to this new church, Tim noted that churches in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia are also in the process of seeking affiliation with the UCC.

The Board voted to affirm Rich Nelson, a member of Pleasant Hill (TN) Community UCC, as the new coordinator of the Southeast Conference Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART). Rich is organizing his support team and is looking forward to arranging training for the team.

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#### **Memorial Service for Richard W. Sales Held at First Congregational Christian UCC, Birmingham, September 23**

The many friends, family, and colleagues of Richard (Dick) Sales gathered at First Congregational Church, Birmingham, where Dick and Nancy Sales were members, to celebrate a life that touched and transformed other lives around the world. Dick's children, Anne, Mark, and Jim, were present, as were his grandchildren, and Mark spoke movingly of their early years as children in South Africa. Kathy Clark of Local Church Ministries of the UCC offered a reflection on the breadth of Dick's ministry in developing theological education by extension across Southern Africa, and noted that some have said no one has had as great an impact on the African church as Dick Sales. Greetings were shared from Sandra Gourdet of Global Ministries, who wrote of the enduring impact of Dick's work in Africa that continues to this day. Scott Douglas, the director of Greater Birmingham Ministries, expressed appreciation for all of Dick's work for justice in Birmingham through the Birmingham churches. Tim Downs spoke of the genius of a model of theological education that reached deeply into the lives of some of the most isolated churches of this conference and brought them new perspectives on ministry, and renewed their relationships with the UCC. Angie Wright of Beloved Community UCC in Birmingham thanked God for a man who was, like a prism, not so noteworthy to look at in itself, but for the light and glory refracted through it, is remarkably beautiful.

The Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference, in consultation with Nancy Sales, invites all who wish to remember Dick or whose lives have been touched by Dick's work through the TAP program to make contributions to the Richard W. Sales Scholarship Fund to benefit TAP and PATHWAYS students. Contributions

may be sent to the Conference.

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## EVENTS CALENDAR

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3

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